

Committee on Resources

Subcommittee on Forests & Forest Health

Testimony of Pat Graham

**Testimony of Pat Graham, Director of Montana Fish, Wildlife, & Parks
for the Subcommittee on Forests and Forest Health
March 24, 1998 10:00 a.m.**

Chairman Chenoweth and members of the subcommittee, my name is Pat Graham, and I am director of the Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks. Our state agency is responsible for managing Montana's wildlife resources, state parks, and other outdoor recreation activities.

In addition to my testimony, I have a letter to the subcommittee from Governor Racicot, which we would request be made a part of the hearing record.

I was here before you five years and one day ago providing testimony for Montana in support of the original Gallatin Range Consolidation and Protection Act of 1993. Since that time, with direction from Congress, Montanans representing diverse interests have worked with each other in unprecedented ways to help accomplish the consolidation of the checkerboard ownership on the Gallatin National Forest.

My agency contributed \$1.7 million generated from the sale of state hunting and fishing licenses toward consolidation of the Porcupine lands in Phase II. The Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation, in partnership with the USFS and Montana FWP, was also instrumental in the completion of Phase II. We in Montana would like to thank Congress for their financial support and direction in the first two phases of the consolidation. During this final phase, Montana FWP is making available land valued in excess of \$1.5 million to be used for exchange to help accomplish this consolidation.

The lands in the bill before you, the Gallatin Lands Consolidation Act of 1998, represents some of the most valuable wildlife habitat in the Gallatin National Forest. Their checkerboard pattern spans four mountain ranges. Land use activities are rapidly changing in this part of Montana. Historically, management on these checkerboard public lands was done in cooperation between private land owners and the federal government. Today, these private lands have become more valuable as residential properties, than for timber, wildlife or recreation. To protect the value, we need to consolidate the public lands. If the consolidation is not authorized, the consequence and impacts of residential development on our valuable resources will not only influence the private lands; it will also affect the use of neighboring national forest lands.

The Taylor Fork is a crown jewel in this third phase of consolidation. The Taylor Fork alone provides winter range for about half the Gallatin elk herd. This herd summers in Yellowstone National Park and winters in Montana. It provides winter range for the highest concentration of moose in the Gallatin, Madison and Yellowstone drainages. This land is the primary route for nearly 2,500 elk which migrate out of Yellowstone National Park to winter in the adjacent Madison Range. This land also has the highest concentration of elk calving grounds in the upper Gallatin. This drainage is entirely within the grizzly bear recovery zone for the Greater Yellowstone area. Numerous streams in this area contain west slope cutthroat

trout, a candidate for listing under the federal Endangered Species Act. In short, this Legislation can ensure that the Taylor Fork lands remain productive for fish, wildlife, recreation and other multiple use values.

I would like to put in perspective the wildlife values of all the lands involved with this exchange. This bill would conserve:

- over 7,000 acres of elk and moose winter range.
- over 54,000 acres of spring, summer and fall elk, moose and mule deer habitat.
- 38,000 acres of ungulate fawning and calving grounds.
- 37,000 acres of occupied grizzly bear habitat, over 11,000 of which are the grizzly bear recovery zone for the Greater Yellowstone area.
- over 54,000 acres of wolverine, pine marten, lynx, bobcat, mountain lion and black bear habitat.
- more than 15 streams and their tributaries which contain trout fisheries (westslope cutthroat, rainbow and brook). Two of these streams contain pure strain Yellowstone cutthroat trout.

From a recreational perspective, this bill would conserve public recreation opportunities including:

- hunting for nearly all of North America's premier big game species (elk, moose, deer, big horn sheep, mountain goats, mountain lions and black bears).
- fishing in the headwaters of some of our nations finest trout streams (Gallatin and Yellowstone)
- over 100 miles of trails for motorized and non-motorized use.
- Montana's longest winter use trail, which connects Bozeman with West Yellowstone, Yellowstone National Park, Idaho and Wyoming.

Perhaps more importantly, this exchange will ensure the next generation of US citizens will have the land management options we have enjoyed throughout this century. These include forest management, public land grazing allotments, recreation management and wildlife management. It is a certainty that this range of opportunities will not persist in the face of residential development of these lands.

Developing the mix of assets and negotiating the compromises that created this proposed land consolidation opportunity has not been easy, And, as the bill works through the legislative process, you will see that the bill has been-carefwly crafted to meet many needs. As a testament to the depth of support by Montanans, all parties have made concessions to preserve the whole. Montana's Congressional delegation has worked tirelessly to develop this bipartisan bill and introduce it so their colleagues in Congress may consider its merits. Big Sky Lumber, as the private landowner, has continually demonstrated patience and persistence in working through the issues with the agencies, public, and Congressional delegation in order to successfully complete this consolidation.

We urge your support of this Legislation.

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